

Madras Parent Council Special Meeting

12 June 2012, Draft Minutes

Present:- Debbie Cumming, Rhona Frood, Bruce Sinclair, Rebecca Trengove, Keith McCartney, Bill Connor, Andy Primmer, Karen Barnett, Cllr Brian Thomson, Ian Jones, Rory MacLeod, Cllr Bryan Poole, Barry Millar, Andy Herd, Callum McLeod, Sam Byers, Charlotte Kirby, Jane Pettegree, Hugh Watson, Lynsey Seeley

Apologies for absence:- Linda Hardie, Cllr Dorothea Morrison, Cllr Tim Brett, Cllr Maggie Taylor, David Rickman, Dawn Waddell

Agenda

The New Madras

After thanking the Parent Council for the opportunity to speak with them, Cllr Bryan Poole (the councillor responsible for the education portfolio on Fife Council's Executive Committee) provided an update on how Fife Council is looking to take the new school issue forward.

Cllr Poole noted that he was an independent councillor, but had been invited to join the Fife Council Executive Committee, and had asked to take on the Education and Families portfolio. He and the labour administration have the view that there was undue haste going for the Kilrymont rebuild option. He suggested that the Kilrymont Road site was the wrong site, and that it is necessary to take some time to look for another option. Fife Council Executive Committee has agreed to look at other options, though the Kilrymont Road site is not off the agenda in case no other site is found. He stated that he would see it as a disappointment if no better site than Kilrymont is found. There is a wish to move quickly, and the £40 million pounds for the new school remains in place.

The new administration had asked the Executive Director of Education how long it would take to get to occupying a new school once planning permission had been obtained, and it was suggested that three years was expected. If builders are on site by April-July of 2013 then it should be possible for the new school site to be in use after the summer of 2016. Even if a move was made for Kilrymont Road rebuild now, it would be a 2016 entry date.

The key issue is to agree on a suitable site. In Fife Council the overwhelming preference is for a site on the western approaches to St Andrews. Planning consent could be straightforward or complex. Dunfermline High School took only six weeks between planning permission being sought and approved. Fife Council wishes to work with communities, including parents and teachers. There is a plan to call a meeting before the end of June of representatives of all the Parent Councils of the schools that feed in to Madras. This would set up the consultation process. There is a desire to take people with them.

The sites flagged up for consideration currently include

- The “pond” site near Andrew Melville Hall, in the ownership of the University; the leader of Fife Council has asked to meet the University Principal to discuss.
- The Strathtyrum site, where Fife Council has identified ownership.
- The Station Park site; in Council ownership, and Fife Council is seeking to talk with the owners of the Old Course Hotel.
- The Petheram Bridge car park, which is in the ownership of Fife Council.

The chairman invited questions to Cllr Poole:-

Q – the last consultation was thought to be flawed, how will this one be different?

There is a wish for more objectivity and more deliberation. Some sites are now known not to be deliverable, so will not be considered again.

Q- is all the £40 million still available, or has some been spent?

Some £600 thousand has been spent so far on developing the Langlands and Kilrymont Road proposals. Fife Council wishes to build a new school meeting current and foreseeable needs, and does not want to skimp at all. All political parties on Fife Council see the New Madras as a priority.

Q – which committee will make the decision?

There are no longer the same committees in Fife Council. It will be the Executive Committee that will make the decision, though the full Council has overall responsibility. It will not be the East Fife Area Committee.

Q- What support for the current school will Fife Council provide?

The Council has and wishes to continue to invest in the infrastructure of the school to keep it in a reasonable condition. The Rector commented that HMIE several years ago condemned the current buildings, and there has been significant deterioration of their condition since then. The Councillor accepted that the current fabric was not ideal.

Q – Can there not be investment in equipment now that can then be transferred to the new school?

This may be investigated. The Chairman asked would it be worth setting up a working group to serve alongside Council and Rector’s team to ensure that pupils in the old buildings are not disadvantaged? The Rector commented that the staff are demoralised, and that conditions are appalling in parts of the school. The Councillor accepted that the situation was difficult for current pupils and staff, and that there was a wish to move forward as quickly as possible. He recognises the need to sustain operations in the current buildings. It was pointed out by a member of the Parent Council that for the young people currently at the school this is their only chance at secondary education, and that it was imperative that they were given reasonable opportunities and resources. If the Rector is commenting that the current school was condemned and has since got worse then surely Fife Council has to take steps to improve conditions?

Q – Will there not be money from selling off the old sites that could be invested in the current and new school buildings?

The usual intention is that any money coming from selling off the old sites would go into general Council funds.

Q – What about a Tay Bridgehead school and a new school in St Andrews?

Cllr Poole reported that all political parties on Fife Council apart from the conservatives were against that proposal due to costs and problematic educational issues. Members of the Parent Council noted that environmental expectations had changed since earlier discussions, and that places like Angus tended to have much smaller schools than in Fife.

Q. A benefit of the Petherum Bridge site could be the resurrection of links with the university.

Cllr Poole believes that the university are interested in doing a deal over the pond site, but don't want anything more involved than that; both sides have been burned by previous experience.

Q. Is someone looking at the depreciation of the £40mIn over time and will there be a time when it won't be enough, meaning that there will have to be a specific end point?

The SNP wanted a specific end point which Cllr Poole resisted, but the administration are working on it as fast as possible.

Q. What is the process that will be followed?

The key issue is site identification. In Cllr Poole's view Pipelands is no better than Kilrymont. It should be possible to work through the four sites on the western approaches fairly quickly. This is a priority for the new administration. Kilrymont is the site of last resort by a long, long way.

Q. When have officials been asked to report back to the Executive on the sites?

They're not waiting for the next Executive meeting [scheduled for after the summer] - they're working continuously on this.

Q. Encouraged that the process will be transparent - this will be a great benefit.

The intention is to work with PC representatives on the best way of ensuring ongoing dialogue. He is meeting the Rector next week to discuss teacher involvement and would also like to include senior pupils. Will also involve community groups in St Andrews.

Q. The chairman asked what the staff's view was.

The Rector noted that this is a forum for parents.